It Isn't A Joke

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CHAPTER I.

Life. EMIL GABLE was the son of an industrious Pennsylvania farmer, and while his parents were not what the world calls wealthy, they were able to procure for their children a first-class education.

Emil grew up on the farm and was a diligent and promising youth. He was given a college education, but when he returned home the farm had lost its attractions, and the profits of that business seemed too small for a man of his ability, and like many other young men he left his quiet country home for the more exciting life of the city.

The business which he chose turned out to be a profitable one, and in a few years he had accumulated considerable means.

At the age of twenty-five he married and took up his abode in a fashionable quarter of the city; his business grew, and Mr. Gable, as he is now generally called, was in a fair way of becoming a wealthy man.

In the course of years his family also grew, and at present we find him a most indulgent father of three children.

The furnishings of the home were costly, and no expense was saved on the wardrobe of any member of his family.

Books were his chief delight, and his library was plentifully supplied with rare and costly volumes. Book agents always had a hearty welcome at his home, and generally met with success when offering to him for sale the latest book. There was one class of agents, however, to whom Mr. Gable was never at home; that was the Life Insurance agent, and many a rebuff the diligent agent received at his hands.

Now there came a time in Mr. Gable's business career when things did not go just as he would like to have had them go; this one year he lost money heavily.

It happened that one day while he sat in his private office an old friend was announced who had lately engaged in the Life Insurance business. He was ushered in, and the two friends chatted pleasantly for a time, when the subject drifted on to insurance, as

it often does when one is talking with an agent of that kind. Mr. Gable remarked that he had no use for that commodity, and that he was able to provide for his family as well as any Life Insurance company could; that at present he could provide for them well, and as he was not dealing in futures the future had no terror for him. Little did he know what was in store for him in the next twenty-four hours. He also expressed his opinion that when he hears of an agent placing a large policy he considers it an immense joke on the insured.

The agent's arguments impressed him more forcibly than ever, and he pondered them a trifle more than he was willing to admit.

The friend remarked that he thought Mr. Gable would some day be willing to let some one have that joke on him, to which he replied that he would let him know when that time came. The subject was dropped for the time being, and soon the friend departed.

Mr. Gable then leaned back in his chair and for the next twenty minutes was busily engaged in thinking.

CHAPTER II.

Death.

Mr. Gable was not only looked up to as a leader among his business acquaintances, but also in the church, and no social event was complete without his presence and co-operation.

On the evening of the day that the closing events of our last chapter took place he was present at a social, and after participating in an elaborate banquet returned to his home at a late hour, and at once retired for the night and was soon peacefully slumbering.

He had been sleeping only for a short time, it seemed, when he was awakened by the clanging of bells, the clatter of hoofs on the asphalt pavement, and the cry of "Fire!" Hastily he arose, dressed himself, and started for the scene of destruction. He had not gone far before he learned the fire was consuming the large warehouses of Gable & Co. "Can it be possible?" he said to himself, "and the bulk of the fire insurance expired yesterday, and I refused the renewal policies because I expected to get it cheaper in

the Eastern Mutual companies!" These thoughts flashed through his brain, and, amid the din and excitement of the hour, totally bewildered him. He started to cross the street, when loud shouts of "Stop! Stop!" met his ears from all sides, and looking up he realized that the fiery steeds of Engine Thirty-six were upon him.

Frantically plunging forward, he fell headlong, barely escaping the heavy wheels, and striking his head on the opposite curb, was picked up unconscious, with blood flowing freely from his temple.

Regaining consciousness, the thought of an accident policy which he had allowed to lapse the first of the year, because he prided himself on being particularly careful, flashed through his mind, and he immediately became unconscious. He was removed to a neighboring hospital, and the message that was sent to the anxious family was, "Mr. Gable is dead." Yes, dead!

The usually happy home became one of sorrow; the arrangements for the funeral were made in the usual manner; black in profusion and flowers in endless numbers—all tokens of the esteem in which this good man was held.

The church where Mr. Gable was accustomed to worship was crowded with weeping relatives and friends, and noiseless feet

moved to and fro; the pastor said comforting words to the family and told the congregation, "In the midst of life we are in death," and spoke of the loss of a good man in the community; the undertaker and sexton consigned the casket to the grave, the mourners returned home, and all was apparently over.

CHAPTER III.

A Journey.

THERE is life beyond the grave, and if you are a believer you must surely believe this, and so it was found by the subject of this sketch.

Come, delay not, for the moments of a future life are as precious as the moments of the life past, and, though dead, Emil Gable found himself moving rapidly through a dark, narrow passage, accompanied by a white-clad being; on and on they went in silence until the darkness was so dense that the only thing visible was the whiteness of the object accompaning him, and at each step of the way the passage seemed to become more narrow, and more oppressive the atmosphere became, until finally the guide in white seemed to sink into the ground, but, as was soon learned, was going down steps; Emil followed. Down, down they went until it seemed they were descending a bottomless pit; but at length another path was reached, even more dark and narrow than the first; at length the sound of voices was heard and in a short time they found themselves in front of a great iron arch with black grated doors, and within witnessed a most revolting scene.

Men and women apparently of every station in life, drinking, carousing, gambling and fighting, the floor strewn with bodies of murdered victims; serpents were everywhere to be seen on tables, floor and walls, and a horrible stench filled the air; as to the conversation heard, it was of the most vile language. The whole scene was one of abhorrence.

A shudder passed over the frame of Emil Gable, and as he turned away from the ghastly aspect his eye caught sight of the inscription over the great black arch: "Doomed to Destruction."

The guide beckoned him on and they began to ascend a steep hill, onward and upward they climbed over rocks and thorns, the path no longer being straight, but winding in its course, and as they proceeded on their way a ray of light gleamed in the path. Then suddenly their progress was stopped for a high wall rose up before them, but only for an instant, for as if by magic they were lifted from their feet and were rapidly moving upward as it were through the air. Again they reached a path, but how different from the one they had left; it appeared to lead through a beautiful land, there was no more darkness, for a wonderful star shone like a beacon before them, and as they drew nearer and nearer it became more brilliant.

Now everything was changed, they seemed to be traveling through a fair country, surrounded by everything that was beautiful.

Then coming around a sharp bend in the way, they found themselves at the top of a small steep hill, at the bottom of which flowed a beautiful wide river fringed on either side by trees of endless variety, so dense with foliage that a full view of the grand stream could not be had from that point of view, but upon descending the hill the path ended at the river bank and the appearance of the water was as a dark, deep, rushing torrent.

Emil looked around for his guide, but found himself entirely alone. What was to be done? He did not know. Surely he could not turn back, and at the thought of that horrible scene at the entrance of the den of those "Doomed to Destruction," a shiver came over him.

While he was meditating, he looked to the other side and there saw the guide beckoning him to enter the water and cross over.

He obeyed, and as soon as he placed his foot on the water it appeared as dry land and he passed over without any inconvenience.

Then again they began passing on toward the star, the goal of their ambition. As they proceeded on their way the star increased in

power and finally became as bright as the sun, and as they passed on sweet melodies pealed forth through the fragrant air, made so by the abundance of flowers and blossoming trees.

At length they reached the end of the journey and found, not a star, but a beautiful golden gate, the reflection of which had given light to the wayfarers on their journey. Over the gate was inscribed in letters far more brilliant than the gate itself: "City of Eternal Rest," and within the gate was a scene that beggars description.

Broad avenues stretched out in every direction, bordered with beautiful evergreens and tropical plants. The inhabitants of the city were all white robed, and in many a shady nook sat solitary persons playing on harps and other stringed instruments.

Here and there fountains of pure sparkling water flowed and sweet songsters hovered near on over-hanging boughs laden with blossoms.

The whole scene was one of peace and happiness.

Emil Gable, after surveying his new and strange surroundings, turned around only to find himself entirely alone again, his guide having disappeared as suddenly as he appeared.

CHAPTER IV.

An Interview.

WONDERING what strange experience would next take place, Emil stood before the gate as though riveted to the spot, but his thoughts were diverted by a voice loud and sweet saying: "Who seeks entrance to the City of Eternal Rest?" and on looking up saw a sight that filled his immortal soul with awe, a face more fair than anything earthly, bathed in a halo of light, with garments snowy white which shone as the sun. It was but a moment until Emil found speech to answer: "Emil Gable." The fair speaker within the portal repeated the name in a loud tone, then asked: "What record do you bear from earth of your past life as a passport to the City of Eternal Rest?"

Emil replied that he had brought no record of his past life; that he had been led thither by a guide and no passport had been given him. To this a smile seemed to pass over the countenance of the being within the gate and he said: "You surely have made a record, and you must render an account of your usefulness on earth before admittance

to this city. My duty is also to find out if you are worthy of a place inside of these gates. Were you a Christian?" "Yes," replied Emil, "I placed my church before my business."

"Were you always honest and upright in your dealings with your fellow men?" The reply came: "I was, to the best of my knowledge. I wronged no man of a penny." "Were you a loving husband and kind father?" "I always loved my family and with my means bestowed every possible luxury upon them," replied Emil. "Then you were a man of means, what the world calls rich?"

"I had plenty of earthly goods, more than I needed for myself and family while I lived." "I suppose then that you provided well for your family that they may still enjoy a comfortable maintenance, now since you are called away?" "I am not sure of that," replied the poor man, as he thought of the condition of his affairs, "for I have met with misfortunes, and I fear there is little, if anything, left."

"And you, Emil Gable, applying here at the gate of the City of Eternal Rest for admittance, while the family that you provided luxuriously for during your time on earth, must tug and toil and eke out a miserable existence.

"And perhaps during the struggle and competition that is required on earth, be trampled under or crowded out, and possibly be thrown on the cold charity of the world; or perchance your children, like many others under similar circumstances, may be lured into evil paths and be forced for a mere existence into vile and criminal practices to their soul's destruction; or perchance they will withstand the temptations and live a virtuous life; they may not be able to withstand the load that has been thrust upon them and their lives may be cut off. Who is their murderer? Who is responsible for all this? You, Emil Gable, and you only; for your criminal neglect to provide for your own when you had ample means!

"Remember, that he who provides not for his own is worse than an infidel, and infidels are not admitted here, they are doomed to destruction. If those whom you loved are not able to cope with the world and are prematurely cut off, their blood is upon you and you are their murderer, and no murderers are admitted here. They are also doomed to destruction."

At these words a shiver passed over the frame of Emil Gable and he sank down unconscious outside the gate of the City of Eternal Rest.

CHAPTER V.

A Retrospect.

JUST how long Emil remained there no one knows, but the anguish that filled his soul paid part penance for his wilful neglect.

He saw as through a glass, dimly, the movements of his loved ones, yet he was not able to take any part in their trouble, nor lend a helping hand. What the fire had not devoured the creditors had, and the family was compelled to give up its fine home and go penniless to a poorer part of the city. He could see faintly their feeble efforts to gain a livelihood, and he saw the flush and bloom of youth fade from the cheeks of his children, who were forced to abandon their education. Day after day the son helped his mother at the washtub and at night she plied the needle by the dim light of a candle, but with all, success was not theirs.

Starvation stared them in the face; barefoot and but thinly clad the children went forward to beg their daily bread.

The health of the mother would no longer allow her to do any part of the work. Emil felt weak and hungry, but saw he was only suffering with his family. At last his wife, unable to bear the load so cruelly thrust upon her, succumbed to that dread disease, consumption, and he saw her enter the City of Eternal Rest.

Not long after he saw the children thrown from their miserable home and become children of the street; not from choice, but from force of circumstances; he saw them educated to crime, but he had no power to correct their waywardness.

He saw them, one by one, doomed to destruction, and felt he was directly responsible for the downfall of each and every one of them. Oh! what anguish filled his inmost soul; if only I had listened to the voice of friends, when for an inconsiderable portion of my income I could have prevented all this misery! Oh! could I go over the last year of my life again I would provide for those loved ones through the means given! It was my own selfish love of money that was the root of all this evil!

Then the mist rolled away. Emil felt cold; he saw more clearly; he lay clad in robes of white, but where? Not outside the Golden Gate. No! but in his own bed at his own home!

Could it have been a nightmare? Impossible! All seemed so real. He felt for the fatal wound on his temple—not even a scratch was there.

Then was it possible that there was no accident and no fire? Was it really possible that he still had his loved ones around him and they and himself together enjoying their usual good health? Such was the case. Emil Gable arose quickly and dressed himself, but when he appeared at the breakfast table he found he had no appetite. The picture of the night's proceedings was reviewed in his imagination. He hastened out to business, but before he entered upon the regular duties of the day he hunted up the friend who had so earnestly pleaded with him the previous day to protect his family against the day of want, and not only willingly, but anxiously, signed an application for a policy of life assurance for a substantial amount, saying as he did so that he "had changed his mind," and "It isn't a joke, after all."

MORAL:

Last clause of Luke 10 : 37.